

- Report No. 86
- October-November 1989



## Sex Tourism and Prostitution

My heart is torn with anguish  
and the terrors of death come upon me.  
Fear and trembling overwhelm me  
and I shudder from head to foot.  
Oh that I had the wings of a dove  
to fly away and be at rest!  
I should escape far away  
and find a refuge in the wilderness;  
soon I should find myself a sanctuary  
from wind and storm,  
from the blasts of calumny, O Lord,  
from my enemies' contentious tongues.

I have seen violence and strife in the city,  
day and night they encircle it,  
all along its walls;  
it is filled with trouble and mischief,  
alive with rumor and scandal,  
and its public square is never free  
from violence and spite.

It was no enemy that taunted me,  
or I should have avoided him;  
no adversary that treated me with scorn,  
or I should have kept out of his way.

It was you, a man of my own sort,  
my comrade, my own dear friend,  
with whom I kept pleasant company.

Psalm 55: 4-14 (NEB)

When I went to the Philippines with MCC in 1984, I knew I was going to be present with "hospitality women" (prostitutes) who worked in Olongapo City in the rest and recreation industry outside of the U.S. Subic Naval Base, but I knew very little about what to really expect there.

The Psalm quoted above has become very important for me as I try to make sense of what I felt and experienced in the Philippines. Not only does it graphically paint a picture of the kind of lives lived by many of my friends, it also, in the last section, speaks to some of my anger and confusion. For, the men I saw who were using children and women as prostitutes were, most often, men of my own sort, men who in other settings I might have kept pleasant company with. I have found myself, since I returned to the United States, trying to make sense of my relationship to those men.

In Olongapo, I found women whom I grew to love. Women who were like me except for one very crucial difference—they were poor and they felt they had few choices. They believed prostitution was the only way they and their families could survive. The lure of Olongapo was American dollars and the dream of marrying an American man who would take them away from the grinding poverty of the Philippines.

I also met Filipino children who sold gum, candy, cigarettes and their bodies to American military men on the streets of Olongapo. The children, like the women, often sent most of their earnings to their families.

One other thing I found in Olongapo: American men, men of my own sort, thousands of them. Coming to terms with my feelings about them and the way they treated my Filipino women and children friends was the hardest thing for me to deal with. I eventually came to see these men as trapped in many ways, also. Like the women and children, many of these American men were young and poor and were in the military because it seemed like a way out to them. Once in Olongapo, the peer pressure to perform sexually was tremendous. Some of the American men, hardened by their military training, were unbelievably cruel to the Filipinos they met. Others, however, seemed like scared boys in the big city for the first time.

While I was in the Philippines, however, I was exposed to men of my own sort involved in another form of prostitution that I still do not understand in any way: sex tourism. I do not understand men whose idea of recreation involves going on a vacation, most often to an impoverished country, for the sole purpose of having sex with the women and children who live there. Especially, I do not understand the men who are pedophiles, sexually interested in children.

Sex tourism takes many forms ranging from the individual who plans his own trip to packaged tours. Some of the men want women as partners, others look for children. A network exists among these men: magazines and books are printed full of glossy pictures and information about the women and children available in various exotic locales. *Bangkok's Backstreets: A Guide to the Pleasures of the World's Open City*, for instance, outlines in detail the places and ways to meet women and children in that city.

In one of the least objectionable paragraphs, the author says: "Every individual is unique, and that's perhaps even more true of the mind-boggling array of beauties Bangkok has to offer, just because the competition is so keen. But it's really rather silly to go ga-ga over one when, by conservative estimates, there are at least 499,999 others you haven't even met yet."

I will never forget my feeling of shame when I listened to three young men from Pagsanjan, a tourist resort outside of Manila, talk about the foreign men, men of my own sort, who visit their town, ostensibly to see the beautiful waterfall there.

One of the young Filipinos told of being courted when he was eight by a 60-year-old European man. There was at that time no work in Pagsanjan, so part of the courtship involved paying for the boys' schooling, buying toys for him and his siblings, even building a house for his family. As we walked through the town with the young men as our guides, they pointed to house after house built by foreigners—huge, beautiful houses that towered above the nipa huts of other Filipinos.

My shame increased as the young men told us they were lucky. Some of their friends had been "adopted" by these foreigners and taken away from their families to other countries.

Two years later I felt more than shame. I was enraged as I have never been before or since. An Austrian doctor on vacation in the Philippines visited Olongapo and took a 12-year-old girl named Rose to a hotel there. He inserted a vibrator into her and left her to die when the vibrator broke apart inside her. This man was picked up by the police in Manila a few weeks after Rose's death when someone recognized his face from a drawing on a police poster. He was with another Filipino child when he was found.

I have spent hours trying to understand these incidents and these men of my own sort. Some of the men say they like Asian women because the women in their own countries are too liberated. Asian women, they say, are submissive, the way women should be.

Other men justify what they are doing by saying their money makes life better for the people in the countries they visit. How else would the parents of the young men in Pagsanjan be able to send their children to school and live in big houses?

As one self-defined "boy-lover" says, "The question of paying or not paying such kids for sex appears to be a crucial issue. In fact, it is simply a reflection of the false equation made by the child protection lobbies, between kids' survival as self-respecting human beings and the survival of the peasant farm. Kids who come to the cities to sell their bodies do so because they cannot, or don't



want to, survive at home, at least for the time being. Whether they live for a few years—their most attractive years—as houseboys, shoe-shiners, kept lovers, or hustlers, they will at least survive. The fundamental question surely is not what happens to these children when they're still young, but *what happens to them when they've outgrown their puppy years, and what happens to the millions of other kids who do not hustle?*"

While the articles in this issue focus on Asia, sex tourism is not only happening there. Consider the American men who visit prostitutes while on business in cities away from their homes. Everywhere in the world where men travel, there is sex tourism. Nor is it only white men who go on these kinds of tours. In the tourist section of Manila there are numerous clubs which cater to the desires of Japanese men, for instance.

The idea of sex tourism may seem remote from us. This

issue of Report is focused on helping us to begin to think about it. The articles by Max Ediger and Brenda Stoltzfus attempt to give us more information about what it is like to be a woman or child involved in tourism prostitution. Max tells the story of one woman in Thailand, while Brenda shows how all forms of prostitution are linked together.

Elizabeth Dominguez, a Filipina theologian, examines some of the Biblical accounts of prostitution, then makes several suggestions about the tasks of Christian women in countries where women are degraded as prostitutes, in other words, the tasks of women in all countries.

She suggests that prostitution be banned and made illegal. Others would propose making prostitution a non-criminal offense or penalizing the men who pay prostitutes rather than the prostitutes themselves. These are all proposals that we can debate after we have taken the time to understand the issues involved.

I believe it is important that we begin to look carefully at all the issues surrounding prostitution, whether related to tourism or otherwise. We all live in countries where prostitution exists and we need, I believe, to admit that and learn more about it. Many of us also may have opportunities to travel to other countries or know people who will and we all have the responsibility for thinking through how we will act as tourists.

In my mind, our work needs to begin with really listening to the stories of women and child prostitutes and realizing that we are not really so different from them as we might think. After that, I believe we must move to the difficult task of trying to begin to understand those men of our own sort who are involved in sex tourism and we must begin to fashion ways to be in dialogue with them and hold them accountable for their actions. It is my hope that these articles will help to point us in those directions.—*Jan Lugibihl*

**Jan Lugibihl worked with MCC for three and a half years in Olongapo City, Philippines, part of the time as country representative for the MCC Philippines team. Presently she is the coordinator of the Christian Urgent Action Network for Emergency Support Philippines, a network which seeks to respond to incidents of human rights abuse in the Philippines.**

Oh that I had the wings of a dove  
to fly away and be at rest!  
I should escape far away  
and find refuge in the wilderness...

Psalm 55:6-7



by Brenda Stoltzfus

## A Vicious Circle

Imagine a barrio. A rural village. For those who have never been to a "Third World Country" it may be hard to imagine. Pictures on TV or in magazines never quite capture the feeling of such places. Remote. Small bamboo houses. Peaceful in its natural beauty and rich fields, but with incredible and sometimes unbearable difficulties for the farming or fishing families who try to survive and keep food on the table while living under heavy militarization and a feudal system of land ownership.

Add a "broken family," as she describes it. The father left when she was four, taking her two-year-old sister with him. She does not know where they are, although she heard through the gossip network that the father sold the daughter. The four-year-old stayed with her mother and grandmother and studied until grade six. She stopped going to school because the mother needed someone to help around the house.

Imagine Olongapo. A bar called "Off Limits." A dark stairway leads to a bar with music loud enough to make one go deaf in five minutes. Ago-go dancers dance on platforms, and American servicemen drink and have a "good time."

The four-year-old is now 18. She is an Ago-go dancer. From 4:00 p.m. to 1:30 a.m., she dances on a platform encircled by a bar and bar stools for better viewing. On a pedestal. She chooses to wear a one-piece bathing suit instead of a bikini because she still feels embarrassment at displaying her body to the American men. As soon as her break comes, she quickly puts a dress over the dancing outfit. She gets paid \$2.50 per night of dancing. If an American wants to take her out, he pays \$20 to the bar and she receives \$10 as commission.

The difference between the worlds is almost beyond comprehension. From a rural barrio to a city outside a U.S. military base where women are slaves to be bought and

sold at whim, a city where Americans have a "good time" and the cost for the women is the serious stuff of life and survival.

What happened in between?

When she was thirteen, living at home and helping her mother, someone from her village offered to find her a job in Manila. She would be a babysitter or a waitress. She agreed. Perhaps if she had a job in Manila, she could help her family. Besides, she had no future in the barrio except marriage and more of the same daily struggle for survival. She went. It was an opportunity. She thought...

When they arrived in Manila, she was taken to a house and put in a dark room. Questions started to intrude in her mind. Why, if she was supposed to be a waitress, was she in a dark room in a strange house? There were other women around. She discovered later that there were three houses with about 350 women. The first night, however, she knew nothing.

Another woman showed her a different room where she saw a woman and a foreigner having intercourse. She finally knew what her real work was to be. She wanted to leave but was not permitted. The full truth dawned on her. She was a prisoner. She still resisted.

The first time she had a customer, two women held her down, one holding her hands above her head and the other holding her feet while the man had sex on her.

She was there for one year. Her customers were tourists from all over the world—Japan, the Middle East, Australia—and some Filipinos. She sometimes had 10 customers in one night. Other women had 15 or 20. She discovered three of her cousins were there. They may be there still. She does not know. One of them was a boy (a janitor). When he saw her, he became angry and beat her for coming there, as if she had made the choice. She was also told by the owner that she owed them P1500.00 (\$75).

While there, she became pregnant. She had an abortion by massage at five months. Abortions by massage are common in the prostitution industry but are usually done at three months or less and sometimes result in serious complications. One week after the abortion, she was given a customer. She cried and pleaded with him to no avail. She was still in great pain. She cried often in that place.

Finally, on her 15th birthday, she managed to escape. A regular Filipino customer took pity on her and agreed to help. She requested that she be allowed to go to church. She was told she could not leave without a guard and the Filipino offered to be the guard. When they were outside, they separated and she was "free."

She had P30.00 (\$1.50) and no place to go. For several days she wandered around Manila, sleeping wherever she could find a place, sometimes in Luneta Park. One day, she was walking through Chinatown and thought she heard her name. She turned and saw a cousin whom she would not have recognized, but who recognized her. She stayed with her for three months.

Her cousin suggested they go to Olongapo. All she knew of Olongapo was that there were a lot of Americans. The two young women went. She, however, had trouble getting a job anywhere because one must be 18 to work in a restaurant or club. She was only 15. Finally she found work in a small country western bar owned by an American.

It was there that I first met her. I remember her sad eyes. But there are so many sad eyes in Olongapo. To me she was one of the many women in pain, the pain of Olongapo. I did not know how to reach into what I felt intuitively was a deep reservoir of pain. I did not know what to ask to draw it out or even if she wanted it drawn out.

For some reason, that night my intuition strongly told me we should take her out of the bar to talk. I followed my intuition and no sooner had we sat down at the center than the story came out. As so often happens in those situations, the facade of makeup and "hospitality" fell away and her vulnerability as an 18-year-old girl trying to survive a kind of hell few of us know anything about shone through.

She has now been in Olongapo for three years. In the time I have known her, she has moved to three different bars. She has been at the present bar for three weeks. She says that at least this owner is less strict than the one at the country western bar, but they tend to get fewer customers from the ships because it is one of the bars sailors are told not to go to.

When a ship comes in, the sailors/marines are told which bars have a high rate of VD and which have women who have tested positive on the regular AIDS testing. Most of the customers at this bar are stationed here and hence, have less money to spend.

She also now has a seven-month-old child. A daughter. She knows the ropes in Olongapo. She knows the Americans are only having a "good time." She knows painfully well what the prostitution industry is about. At 18, she has already experienced five years of slavery and abuse. She seems vulnerable and wise at the same time.



As I listen to her talk, another recent conversation comes to mind with a mother who lives in a small barrio just outside of Olongapo. A place called Cabalan which was originally set up as a resettlement area for the Aetas (the indigenous tribal people in this area whose sacred land the base now occupies). They have not moved further back into the mountains as Olongapo grew and the lowlanders began moving there.

She talks about the recruiters coming to offer jobs in Japan to the young girls living in Cabalan. Many of us know that it is a trick similar to the one my other friend experienced. The young girls and their families, however, do not know and even if they did, they hang on to the hope that they will be lucky and will get the work promised to them. What else can they hope for? What future is there for poor young

• Women in Ministry

**Mary Lou Cummings** of Quakertown, Pa. succeeds Virginia G. Schlabach as editor of Franconia Conference News. Schlabach continues as half-time coordinator of mission information services for Franconia Mennonite Conference.

**Julia Yoder** succeeds Marilyn Graber as admissions counselor at Goshen College, Goshen, Ind. She worked previously as interim youth coordinator at Bay Short Mennonite Church in Sarasota, Fla.

**Lois Keeney** of Akron, Pa. has been named new coordinator of the MCC Global Family Program. The program currently benefits 1,800 people in 13 countries. Keeney replaces Ruth Detweiler.

women in Olongapo where the main industry is R & R (rest and recreation)? What future is there for young girls in the rural provinces of the Philippines?

It is a vicious circle. The trafficking of young women will continue as long as the poverty and patriarchal system continue. The poverty will continue as long as the Philippines is dominated by the United States. The circle must be broken.

**Brenda Stoltzfus** has worked with MCC in the Philippines since 1984. Her assignment has been to work with hospitality women outside the U.S. Subic Naval Base and she has traveled in other parts of Asia to learn more about the issues of prostitution.

by Elizabeth Dominquez

## Biblical Concept of Human Sexuality: Challenge to Tourism

Prostitution is rendering sex service for hire—a commercialization of sex. Sex which has been given to us by God for deepest communion is now an instrument for money. In prostitution, there is no commitment and the sexual relationship is not a binding one.

The story of Rahab is similar to that of many Philippine prostitutes. In Joshua 2, Rahab negotiated with the Israelite conquerors, who were entering Canaan as conquerors. They entered Canaan as a community of equals rather than of kings and slaves.

When Rahab negotiated with the Israelite conquerors, she did so for the security of her family. She says: "We have heard so much of how strong you are as fighters and we have no way of getting away from you. I want to make sure I will be able to secure my father, my mother, my brothers and sisters, so I want to negotiate with you."

As the dialogue goes on, the Israelites, the Hebrew soldiers, say, "Yes, you are going to be secure with your father, your mother and your brothers." Sisters are omitted. It is a startling omission, since Rahab mentions father, mother, brothers and sisters.

Many Philippine prostitutes are engaged in this trade precisely for the security of their families: father, mother, brothers, sisters and even daughters. The virtue of Rahab is that she was willing to do what was needed for the sake of her family.

In the Old Testament, we have texts which specifically condemn prostitution. Leviticus 19:29 prohibits a Hebrew family from having a daughter given up to prostitution. In Deuteronomy 23:18, hiring a harlot is unfit as an offering to God. However, in both Leviticus and Deuteronomy, there is still the spirit of Jewish superiority over Gentiles. When the families were appealed to forbid their daughters to become prostitutes, this applied only to Jews. While condemning an act for some, it was deemed good for others.

In Amos 2:7, Amos lived in a materially progressive, rich society. It was the highest economic standard that the Hebrew people ever reached. It is tragic, however, when material development is accompanied by the continuous degradation of women. What is happening in modern society was happening in Amos' time. In the book of Amos, the poor are sold for a pair of shoes, while the upper class sleep in beds of ivory and enjoy winter and summer houses. A father and son use the same maiden. The prophet Amos not only criticizes it, he vehemently condemns it.

In the Old Testament barren women used their housemaids to enable their husband to bear a son, as seen in the stories of Rachel and Leah and of Sarah and Abraham. Sarah used her maid. This is a good illustration of women from a higher economic class exploiting their own sex group.

Another group of women who easily became prostitutes were women who belonged to conquered nations. In Joel 3:1-3, the little boys of the conquered nations were also overpowered by conquering men.

This is similar to the situation in my own country. In the Philippines, where you have beautiful surroundings enjoyed by tourists, you also have male children ranging in age from six to 14, sometimes up to 20, at the service of tourists. The exploitation of women is also accompanied by the exploitation of other human beings who, because of their economic status or age are considered at the disposal of others who are stronger. In the end, prostitution



**Strength, Struggle, and Solidarity: India's Women**, a new book by Dorothy Yoder Nyce, grows out of this year's C. Henry Smith Peace Lectureship and a special study tour of India. The book, published by Pinchpenny Press of Goshen College, is available for \$2.50 (plus \$1 postage/handling) from the author at Goshen College, Goshen, IN 46526.

Hilda Froese Tiessen has been named vice president and academic dean at Conrad Grebel College. She has been a member of the Conrad Grebel faculty since 1983. She has a doctorate in English from the University of Alberta.

is really an instance of human beings using and controlling other human beings, though it be under the guise of tourism or the rest and recreation of military personnel.

The Gospels give us a picture of Jesus' treatment of prostitutes. In the story of the woman of Samaria, Jesus engages a prostitute in a serious theological discussion. In need, Jesus initiates the conversation by asking the woman for a drink of water. Jesus dignifies the Samaritan woman by taking her seriously as a human, capable of holding a conversation with him.

The woman is taken seriously and proves herself capable of such a discussion. Out of that dialogue Jesus produces the most effective evangelist, because the woman's testimony converts a whole Samaritan village. How many of us consider prostitutes capable of discussing theological issues and of evangelizing a village?

John 7:53-8:1 is the story of a woman caught in the act of adultery. How can adultery be committed by a woman alone? It is just the woman caught in adultery; there is no mention of any man. The men are there to stone the woman. Our male translators and male preservers of tradition find it all right to keep the record like that. The immortal statement of Jesus in concluding the issue is this: "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." In the eyes of Jesus, there is no hierarchical arrangement of sin.

To the religious leaders, Pharisees, Sadducees and Scribes, Jesus said, "Thieves, prostitutes and harlots will go to heaven ahead of you." There is a story of one exceptionally beautiful Filipina prostitute who had a relationship with a rich Filipino, Harvard-trained technocrat. He was so attracted to her that he offered marriage.

But the prostitute did not want to marry him. So he said, "Look, I'm offering you a new future and a decent life, in spite of everything." The prostitute answered: "You know I sell my body, but do you realize that you are selling your soul by playing into the hands of multi-nationals that rape our natural and human resources?" The woman was saying, in effect, that offering her a decent future was incompatible with the act of robbing the Filipino people, a graver sin. "I sell my body, you sell your soul."

We do not have to be technocrats to participate in the guilt of such a man. If we do not feel responsible for doing something about the degradation of women of another economic class who have internalized their degradation and humiliation, we are no less guilty than the Filipino technocrat.



Artist unknown

Our primary task is the education of women—prostitutes and non-prostitutes alike—so that prostitutes can be acknowledged as the victims of a social order in which women have been taken as commodities. Let us all graduate from moralism. Is it our goal to be moral, decent persons, or to be persons who know how to give or enhance human life in others?

As long as we want to be moralistic there cannot be genuine communication between the prostitutes and ourselves. This is possible only if we come to prostitutes with an understanding and analysis of society. We need to ask—why has material progress not heightened the value of human dignity? Why is it that the more we improve materially, the more we behave like beasts? It is like the tower of Babel, where human beings built a tower to go up where they thought they could find God. The tower was destroyed, and they got instead the opposite result.

**Vera Isaak** succeeds Herman Neff as SELFHELP Crafts Canada director starting in September 1990. She currently serves with Partnership Africa Canada in Ottawa. She served previously with MCC in Europe, Asia and Canada.

**Edith Fransen**, Charleswood Church, Winnipeg, has been honored by the Manitoba Foster Parents Association for her work with children and foster parents in Manitoba during the last 22 years.

**Mathilde Gyger**, Schaezli, Switzerland, is the new president of the publication committee for *Der Zionspilger*, the official publication of the Swiss Mennonite Church, printed in German and French.

**Kathy Shantz** has been named women's concerns director for MCC Canada. She succeeds Peggy Regehr. Shantz will work out of the MCC Ontario office in Kitchener. She and her husband, Reg Good, served with MCC 1984-1986 in the MennoVan, which toured Canada to promote the 200th anniversary of the coming of Mennonites to Canada. She is currently a doctoral candidate.

**Evelyn Shenk** was commissioned as a chaplain at Rockingham Memorial Hospital on July by Shalom Mennonite Congregation, Harrisonburg, Va.

**Delton and Marian Franz**, Washington, D.C., both 1965 graduates of Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., received the Distinguished Achievement Award during commencement weekend in May.

Our second task as Christian women is to struggle for women's rights to jobs that have often been reserved for men. As women, we need to be trained for the worthwhile jobs that are often assigned only to men.

Our third task is to work for the banning of prostitution. Prostitution is supposed to be illegal in our country, but no one is objecting to it. In Manila, we have 24-hour service to help treat venereal diseases in the prostitution district.

Women need the cooperation of men to help solve the problem—men willing to join us in the effort. We will be laughed at and there will be all sorts of hindrances in trying to ban prostitution. The opposition will come from both prostitutes and prostitute users, such as the military. Sadly, it is assumed that if you want to satisfy soldiers then they must be provided with women. That is how the issues of military bases are always connected to the issue of prostitution. Why can we not be more creative in providing soldiers with more wholesome recreation? Why can we not help humanize them? Why is it assumed that this is a need which should be provided for?

Our fourth task is the serious rehabilitation of prostitutes. This is a delicate issue. They should not feel that we regard them as dirty or degraded human beings. Prostitutes themselves would tell us of their need for a new life.

All of us who are not of the poor class need to address the issue of poverty if we are to take the issue of prostitution seriously. Why are there human beings whose basic needs are not met? What is wrong with our economic and political structures? What is wrong with our community life? All this is a big issue and we could immediately be branded as Marxist or communist, if we stubbornly insist on dealing with the issue of poverty and putting it in the forefront. For as someone said, "when I gave something to the poor I was called a saint, but when I asked WHY there are the poor, I was called a communist."

The issue of poverty is complicated. But are we, women, really willing to be part of the group that would address the issue? How can the issue of poverty be addressed effectively? For this is at the root of prostitution, at the root of the degradation of persons, especially of women.

I hope we will seriously consider the tasks before us. I also hope that what I have shared will challenge us to re-read the Scriptures through the eyes of women.

**Elizabeth Dominquez**, a member of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, is a professor of Old Testament at Union Theological Seminary in Dasmarinas, Cavite, Philippines. This selection is reprinted with permission from a longer article of the same name in *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology as Asian Women*, Virginia Fabella, MM and Sun Ai Lee Park, editors, 1989.

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## DID YOU KNOW THAT...

- Women used for prostitution are exploited not only by the tourist, but by the "system" that entraps them. In the Philippines, the average prostitute receives \$60, of which she keeps only \$4.25 to \$5.75. The rest is parceled out to the club owner, the tour guide, the tour operator and the hotel, not counting political payoffs or deductions and fines levied on the women for tardiness and other infractions.
- According to 1982 unofficial statistics, 700,000 women are in prostitution in Thailand and 200,000 are used for sex tourism. It's no wonder then, that Bangkok has the reputation of being the "biggest brothel" in Asia.
- As a "morale booster" Japanese companies reward their outstanding branch managers and salesmen with all-expense paid tours to South Korea's brothels....Chartered tours of two nights and three days cost no more than \$200—including the price of sex. South Korea has been made into a playground for Japanese men.
- What the average tourist consumes in Tunisia in a week, in the way of meat, butter, dairy products, fruit and pastries, is equivalent to what two or three Tunisians eat in a whole year.

**The above facts are reprinted from Women's Link, p.12, December 1988.**



by Max Ediger

## The Story of Lek

At 5'8", Lek stands tall in comparison to most of the Thai women who work on Pat Pong Street, one of Bangkok's most notorious night life districts. People smile when Lek gives her name because it means small in Thai. Lek, however, does not smile. She rarely smiles these days. Life has not been good to her, and the strain in her eyes shows it.

Like many of the other dancers in the Pat Pong bars, Lek originally lived in a small rural village where she helped with the cyclical chores of tilling, planting and harvesting. It was a good life, but extremely difficult. Her village was noted for its poverty. Insufficient rains and brutally hot summers kept the rice production down to a minimum. There was barely enough money to feed the family.

At the age of 18, Lek married a young man from another village. His family was fairly wealthy, compared to most people in Lek's village, so life finally looked more promising. Together they had four children.

After the fourth child was born, Lek's husband suddenly deserted her, forcing her to leave their house with the children and only what she could easily carry with her. She moved to Bangkok hoping to get a job which would provide her enough money to feed and clothe her children whom she loved very much.

Traditionally, village girls have little chance for education, a privilege given more to the young boys, so Lek had little to offer as she searched for work in the city of six million people. She finally ended up on Pat Pong Street.

Today Lek works in a sex show. Every half hour or so she climbs up on the stage, undresses, and slowly (dancing very unevenly to the music blaring from the speakers) pulls a string out of her vagina to which are tied about 15 razor blades in a series.

She hates her work. She feels degraded and filthy. But what

are her choices? "I have to feed my children," she says. "They are the only thing I have left, so I have to do this for them."

The audience consists of men, and a few women, from several European countries as well as several from Japan and Hong Kong. They watch passively as they sip on their drinks. No one applauds when she finishes her act. No one really seems to care that the razor blades give her infections regularly, and that she has to pay her own doctor bills. They just want to see this strange act before they stagger on to other "thrills." Few of them also want to know why they have so much money to spend in this way while women like Lek have to destroy their own bodies in order to earn enough to barely feed themselves and their children.

Tourism is now the largest foreign income earner for Thailand. This year the goal is 4.5 million tourists, and they will bring in many millions of dollars. The money



**Karen Klassen Harder**, South Bend, Ind., will begin in January 1990 as half-time assistant professor of economics at Bethel College, North Newton, Kan. She is completing her Ph.D. in family planning and consumer economics this summer.

**Sarah Klassen**, author of *A Journey to Yalta* (documenting part of the Mennonite experience) has been awarded the Gerald Lampart Award in poetry by the Canadian League of Poets.

**Amelia and Newton Old Crow**, graduates of Cook Theological School, Tempe, Ariz., have begun as pastoral leaders at Zion Church, Canton, Okla., and Indian Church, Selling, Okla.

from this tourism does little to raise the standard of living of Lek and almost one million other men and women involved in providing sex to the tourists. The money goes to a few wealthy Thais and to the owners of the hotels, travel agencies, and bars, many of whom are Europeans.

Although government officials argue that the standard of living is going up for the general population of Thailand, a recent study of the distribution of national income, done by a Canadian embassy official, revealed that the gap between the top 20 percent and the remaining 80 percent of the population is growing. In 1975, 20 percent of the population earned 49.26 percent of the total national income while the remaining 80 percent of the people shared 50.74 percent. By 1985, the top 20 percent of the population were earning 55.63 percent, with the remaining 44.37 percent shared by the rest of the population. This means that more people will be forced into selling themselves in order to survive in this rapidly changing society.

Statistics show that about 80 percent of all the tourists are men. It is also well known that many of them come only for sex. When a general outcry against such open prostitution began to push the government to pass some kind of controls, several towns in the southern part of Thailand protested saying that their economies would immediately die if prostitution was ended.

Instead, they called for the legalization of prostitution so they could operate more freely. Their official conference

emphasized the irony of the situation in which a large group of people operating illegal businesses can meet openly to request that their businesses be made legal in order to improve profits. Little has been done to control these illegal operations which make money from the bodies of the poor.

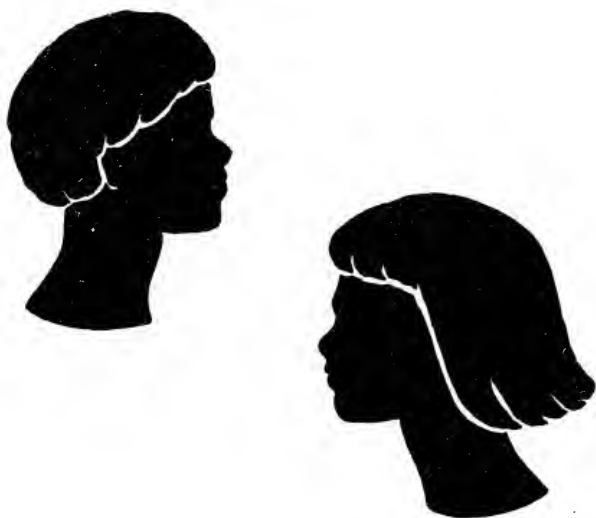
Like all businesses, new and different kinds of services must be provided to keep the tourists coming for sex. Now, more and more young children, both boys and girls, are being used to attract the visitors. On January 17, 1989, the *Bangkok Post* ran an editorial which said in part: "The Children's Rights Protection Center estimates some two million women earn their living from prostitution, including about 800,000 children under 16. Although the claim has yet to be verified, a worrying fact disclosed by the center is that of 200 child prostitutes admitted to the center, only one was lured into the flesh trade. The others were sold to procurers by their parents."

To explain this phenomenon, the editorial went on to say: "Another tragic fact uncovered by the center is that the 'sale' of children was motivated mainly by money and the benefits it can generate. Parents, mainly the rural poor, are faced with too many irresistible temptations—the 'good life,' materialistic luxuries and the social status gained in the eyes of neighbors by money sent home by daughters engaged in prostitution in cities."

Although tourism cannot be blamed for prostitution, a link between tourism and the present expansion of the the business can be made. Tourists bring in money and images of the "modern life." The country which craves the tourist dollar will willingly sell any commodity which the tourists demand. If that is the bodies of their young people, so be it. With these tourist dollars, the young people are promised that they will be able to buy the flashy consumer goods which the tourists flaunt all around them. The supply and demand theory goes into full practice.

The future of Lek and the multitude of other young men and women caught in this supply and demand process does not look very promising. They can only have hope if all of us are willing to look at some of the basic issues involved such as the unjust distribution of wealth and resources between rich and poor countries, social values which make some people in the society only an object of sex, and a kind of tourism which places more emphasis on pleasure (of all kinds) above the value of the human being. This we must all take responsibility for.

**Max Ediger**, a former MCC worker, has lived in Thailand for 13 years and, among other things, has worked as an enabler with women's groups working on the issues of prostitution.



Ron and Ruth Penner were recently installed as pastors of Huntington Mennonite Church, Newport News, Va. She completed studies at Eastern Mennonite Seminary in May.

Isabel Mullet was ordained as assistant pastor of Hillside Chapel, Jackson, Ohio, in the spring. Licensed in 1987, she serves alongside Pastor Jim Mullet, her husband.

## Resources

- Ecumenical Coalition on Third World Tourism (ECTWT)  
P.O. Box 24 Chorakhebu  
Bangkok 10230  
Thailand

This group publishes the magazine *Contours*, has a project on Tourism and Child Prostitution and has also published a book: *Tourism: An Ecumenical Concern*.

- Center for Responsible Tourism  
2 Kensington Rd.  
San Anselmo, CA 94960
- South Pacific People's Foundation of Canada (SPPF)  
409-620 View St.  
Victoria, BC  
Canada V8W 1J6

Publishers of a reading packet on Tourism in the Pacific Islands.

- Center for the Prevention of Sexual and Domestic Violence  
1914 N. 34th Street, Suite 105  
Seattle, WA 98103

The center will be providing resources to North American religious groups to raise their awareness of sexual assault, domestic violence, and prostitution in countries of the Pacific Rim, and will be working with organizations in the Pacific Rim to bring about necessary changes.

- Fabella, Virginia, MCC and Sun Ai Lee Park, ed. *We Dare to Dream: Doing Theology As Asian Women*. Hong Kong: Asian Women's Resource Centre for Culture and Theology, 1989.

Contains the complete Elizabeth Dominquez paper, as well as others written by Asian women on a variety of topics.

- Health Action Information Network (HAIN)  
9 Cabanatuan Road  
Philam Homes  
Quezon City, Philippines

Publishers of *Pom Pom: Child and Youth Prostitution in the Philippines*.

## Reader Feedback

- Thank you for the energy and imagination you give to *Report*.
- Each issue is enlightening and a challenge. Thanks to those who are planners and contributors. Keep up what has been started. I share my issue with others.
- Thanks for covering the difficult topic of incest.
- I usually read it upon arrival. I like the courage you show in tackling difficult issues. Thanks for continually presenting the unheard voices of our diverse church. Somehow we have to speak out—this is a good beginning.
- Keep up the good work. I was in the audience that heard Clarice Kratz tell her story. I was deeply moved by her courage and movement toward shalom and further joyed by her postscript in the incest issue (no. 83). I plan to preach a family series in the near future and address the issue of sexual abuse and incest and the journey to shalom. Thanks for the good work. I am especially interested in the inclusion of women from other cultures. I pass my copy on to a friend when I finish with it.
- My husband reads it before me. Hooray!
- The incest issue (no. 83) has been informative and was very well put together.

- 
- You're to be commended to deal with various issues that we wish didn't exist. Keep it up.
  - Thanks for covering a broad range of interesting topics. How about including mothering of young children or stay at home moms?
  - I used material from *Report* as discussion studies for a Sunday school quarter on womens issues this past winter. The class worked very well. You do a good job of looking at the various "sides" to issues. We also appreciated issues most which included some input on spiritual theological understanding of issues and our responses.
  - I enjoy reading each issue and commend you for a well-edited paper.
  - I find *Report* interesting and willing to be frank and honest. I usually pass on my *Report* to others and have given them to student's to use as resources in research.
  - I am searching for work after pastoring a church full-time on half-time salary. When (if) I find work I'll send double for I think *Report* is very important.
  - Your work is greatly appreciated!
  - I always read your entire newsletter. Glad that you discuss real issues.
  - I always read *Report* immediately and share it with my daughters and daughter-in-law. Don't stop!
  - I appreciate *Report* very much. As a chaplain, I notice an increase of Mennonite female patients in psychiatric wards, especially in eating disorders, anorexia, and bulimia. I would appreciate an issue dealing with this subject.
  - Thank you for tackling the difficult issues. Too often the church is silent about sexuality, abuse, incest, etc. To honestly confront and share in vulnerability brings the healing God desires for us. Being a newsletter of MCC, I would encourage you to expand the space given to women from all parts of the globe. Although the languages, cultures and economic circumstance vary, there is commonality in experience.
  - I enjoy receiving *Report* and it has encouraged me many times. It has also widened my scope on different issues. Thank you.
  - I always look forward to *Report* because it tackles subjects that we often don't speak about as Christians and finds women who are prepared to talk honestly about their experience.
  - Since first receiving *Report* I have been richly blessed by many issues, especially No.76 on God-Talk. Thank you for that and all the others.
  - I have used *Report* as a resource many times—as a student in social work, as a social worker in giving workshops or sharing information with colleagues. It speaks to a large gap in spiritual/practical concerns not often addressed in our churches.
  - I have received *Report* for sometime now and am impressed with its focused and thought-provoking articles. It is heartwarming and encouraging to see that women are able to articulate their experiences and find support. Hopefully men are also subscribing to this magazine so that they together with women can hear and find solutions and change in our churches and homes.
  - We are very disappointed in your interpretation of Proverbs 13:24 (*Report* on incest (No. 83)).
  - I appreciate receiving *Report*. It contains a lot of pertinent information that needs to be "aired" in our constituency. Congratulations on a very important publication.
  - I appreciate the information about current issues. It helps me to understand and have compassion for many helpless victims.
  - I appreciate *Report*. As the editor of a women's newsletter I am aware of how much hard work goes into each issue.
  - I very much appreciate *Report*. Thanks for the wisdom, encouragement and sensitivity that goes into the articles—their selection and the overall thematic choices for each issue.
  - I'm living through wife abuse and incest. I am a Mennonite. It's a nightmare. I'd like the two issues of *Report* on incest (No. 83) and wife abuse (No. 74). Thank you.

**Elsie Flaming Schmidt**, New Creation Fellowship, Newton, Kan. has been named Volunteer of the Year by the Kansas Department of Corrections. She works about 20 hours a week at the Kansas State Industrial Reformatory in Hutchinson, Kan. as assistant chaplain.

**Mary J. Dych**, Mennonite Church of Normal, Ill., has been appointed Maple Lawn Health Center administrator.

**Rebecca Linsenmeyer** is the first recipient of a peace and justice assistantship for a female student enrolled in peace studies at AMBS, Elkhart, Ind. Women in Mission and the Commission on Home Ministries of the General Conference will make this award annually.

**Beth Hege**, Aberdeen, Idaho, has been named director of news service and public information at Bethel College, North Newton, Kan.

**Elizabeth Hostetler**, Bluffton (Ohio) College professor of education, was one of two recipients of the Martha Holden Jennings Foundation's "distinguished educator" award.

- I have been receiving *Report* since the first copy. It has helped me tremendously in being aware. Keep up the good work! It makes me think though that the subject of abortion is too touchy an issue to be looked at.
- I have learned a lot and have enjoyed receiving *Report*. The last issue on incest was particularly helpful. Thanks.
- Excellent magazine—excellent work the committee is doing. Thanks.
- I am very grateful for this publication and it's honesty in dealing with the realities of life as it pertains to women.
- Do we still need this paper? Would these articles not be welcomed by *The Mennonite* and *The Reporter*?
- I read each issue of *Report* from cover to cover and often use it as resource material in our Sunday school class. It is always fresh, pertinent and helpful. Thank you so much.
- Thank you for your probing, your insights, your courageous approach to women's concerns. I need *Report* to assure me that the Mennonite church is finally addressing it's attitudes on sexism (needs of women, inclusive language, respect for female intelligence, administrative abilities, etc.) in a small way.
- I have been a practicing Roman Catholic all my life but am very grateful for this publication. I have learned so much and found comfort and help in so many ways. Thank you.
- Everyone should have access to *Report* regardless of finances. Here is my contribution. Let me return the favor of a free subscription I received.
- I find *Report* informative and thought-provoking. As soon as we have a regular income, I will try to send a contribution. We've spent a year after an MCC term trying to resettle—still not there yet. Thanks.

## Give Women's Concerns Report this Christmas

Topics in 1990: Servanthood, Aging, South African Women, Co-dependency, Environment, Childcare

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Make donations payable to MCC.

**Anita Warkentin Brendle**, Akron, Pa., has completed more than 22 years with MCC. She began in 1963 in the personnel department and has served in various roles, including that of administrative assistant in the MCC office in West Germany from 1966 to 1969.

**Ruth Detweiler**, Akron, Pa., has completed more than 20 years with MCC which began with the Teachers Abroad Program in the late 1960's. She has worked in Tanzania, Newfoundland and in Akron with the Child Sponsorship Program.

**Susan Loepp**, Normal, Ill., was named an Academic All-American at Bethel College, North Newton, Kan., for the second consecutive year at the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics tennis championships in Kansas City, Mo.

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## News and Verbs

- "Violence against women," writes Lori Heise in The Washington Post, "is perhaps the most pervasive yet least recognized human rights issue in the world." Heise, a senior researcher at the Worldwatch Institute, says she "never intended to investigate violence. I was researching maternal and child health issues overseas. But I would

commonly begin my interviews with a simple question: 'What is your biggest problem?.' With unnerving frequency, the answer came back: 'My husband beats me.'"

- Elimination of wage discrimination in the United States can be achieved if the church actively participates in the effort. Claudia Wayne, executive director of the Washington-based National Committee on Pay Equity, cites statistics showing continuing pay inequity between men and women. Forty-six percent of the workforce is now women. However, women receive 65 percent of what men are paid for comparable work in the U.S.

*REPORT* is published bimonthly by the MCC Committee on Women's Concerns. The committee, formed in 1973, believes that Jesus Christ teaches equality of all persons. By sharing information and ideas, the committee strives to promote new relationships and corresponding supporting structures in which men and women can grow toward wholeness and mutuality. Articles and views presented in *REPORT* do not necessarily reflect official positions of the Committee on Women's Concerns.

*REPORT* edited by Christine Wenger Nofsinger. Layout by Sandy Unruh. Correspondence and address changes should be sent to Chris Nofsinger, Editor, MCC, PO Box 500, Akron, PA 17501-0500.

U.S. residents may send subscriptions to the above address. Canadian residents may send subscriptions to MCC Canada, 134 Plaza Drive, Winnipeg, MB R3T 5K9. A donation of \$10.00 per year per subscription is suggested.



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